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Are The John Birchers Subversive?

At what point does a patriotic organization become subversive?

That question is far from paradoxical in connection with the John Birch Society, a tight-knit anti-Communist cult whose founder and director is a farm boy and UNC graduate from North Carolina named Robert Welch.

Mr. Welch's John Birch Society has "cells" in 35 states, each cell consisting, according to a Time Magazine report, of 20 to 30 members. Its activity is semi-secret and is based on what appears as a violently extreme estimate of the nature of the internal Communist threat. Mr. Welch regards the U.S. as 40 to 60 per cent "Communist-controlled" and has an exceedingly low estimate of the patriotism of several Americans whom most others regard as unimpeachable patriots. In his book, "The Politician," Mr. Welch has, Time writes, delivered the following estimates:

"Milton Eisenhower is actually Dwight Eisenhower's superior and boss within the Communist Party. For (like) there is only one possible word to describe his purposes and his actions. That word is treason."

CIA Director Allen Dulles is "the most protected and untouchable supporter of Communism, next to Eisenhower himself, in Washington." His brother, the late secretary of state, was "a Communist agent."

Of course, the country has no end of persons and organizations who style it their mission to search for "subversion." Most of them unfortunately suffer from a

too-rigid notion of what it is and seek it only in certain predictable quarters. The John Birch Society, with its fantastic libels of a former President and secretary of state, is exactly the sort of group that tends to be excused when it undermines government because its motives are flagrantly "patriotic." It should not be excused. If the American public ever accepts the notion that its Eisenhowers and Dulleses are Communist dupes or agents, in whom is it to trust?